

Message Text

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SUBJECT: TORIES EASILY RETAIN TWO BY-ELECTION SEATS

SUMMARY: THE CONSERVATIVES, APRIL 27, EASILY WON THE
WYCOMBE AND EPSOM BY-ELECTIONS, RETAINING TWO "SAFE"
TORY SEATS.

THE LIBERAL VOTE IN BOTH CONSTITUENCIES COLLAPSED,
ADDING TO THAT PARTY'S WOES. THE GOVERNMENT'S CURRENT
WORKING MAJORITY IS 18. END SUMMARY.

1. AS EXPECTED, THE CONSERVATIVES RETAINED THE WYCOMBE
AND EPSOM CONSTITUENCIES IN APRIL 27 BY-ELECTIONS.
IN BOTH CASES THEY INCREASED THEIR SHARE OF THE TOTAL
VOTE, MOSTLY AT LIBERAL EXPENSE, THOUGH LABOR TOO LOST
GROUND IN THE TRADITIONALLY TORY CONSTITUENCIES.
THE RESPECTIVE SWINGS AGAINST LABOR WERE 8 AND 6.7
PERCENT, NOT PARTICULARLY WORRISOME FROM THE GOVERNMENT'
STANDPOINT BECAUSE OF THE RELATIVELY LOW VOTER TURNOUT
(59 PERCENT IN WYCOMBE COMPARED TO 74.3 PERCENT IN
OCTOBER 1974; 54.8 PERCENT IN EPSOM, COMPARED TO 73.7
PERCENT).

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PAGE 02 LONDON 06744 281451Z

2. THE MOST INTERESTING ASPECT OF THESE BY-ELECTIONS
WAS THE CONTINUED COLLAPSE OF THE LIBERAL VOTE, RE-
AFFIRMING THE TREND NOTED IN RECENT BY-ELECTIONS AND
IN OPINION POLLS. IN WYCOMBE THEIR SHARE OF THE VOTE
DROPPED FROM 19.3 TO 7.4 PERCENT, COSTING THEM THEIR
DEPOSIT, WHILE IN EPSOM IT DROPPED FROM 26.6 TO 12.8

PERCENT, RELEGATING THEM TO THIRD PLACE BEHIND LABOR. THE NATIONAL FRONT, WHICH HAD HOPED TO DO WELL IN WYCOMBE, RECEIVED 4.1 PERCENT OF THE TOTAL, FRACTIONALLY UP FROM OCTOBER 1974. IN EPSOM THEY WON ONLY 1.9 PERCENT AND FINISHED IN LAST PLACE BEHIND AN INDEPENDENT "ROYALIST" CANDIDATE WHO GOT 5.3 PERCENT.

3. THE LABOR/CONSERVATIVE BALANCE IN COMMONS IS NOW 307 TO 282 (ONE LABOR SEAT VACANT). IN GENERAL, THE GOVERNMENT CAN COUNT ON A MAXIMUM OF 323 VOTES (LABOR PLUS LIBERALS, SLP AND SDLP), COMPARED TO 285 FOR THE TORIES (CONSERVATIVES PLUS THREE ULSTER UNIONISTS). THE REMAINING 22 ARE HELD BY SCOTTISH AND WELSH NATIONALISTS, ULSTER UNIONISTS AND AN INDEPENDENT, LEAVING THE GOVERNMENT'S WORKING MAJORITY AT 18.

4. COMMENT: THE TORY LEADERSHIP WAS CLEARLY PLEASED WITH THESE RESULTS. LORD THORNEYCROFT, THOUGH SOMEWHAT HYPERBOLIC, CLAIMED THAT THE OUTCOME DEMONSTRATED "THE PEOPLE ARE CALLING OUT FOR A GENERAL ELECTION AND THE CHANCE TO THROW OFF THE SHACKLES OF SOCIALISM". THE RESULTS OF THESE BY-ELECTIONS, HOWEVER, CANNOT BE CONSIDERED RELIABLE INDICATORS BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF THE TWO CONSTITUENCIES AND THE LOW-VOTER TURNOUT.

5. NEVERTHELESS, THE CONTINUED HAMMERING OF THE LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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LIBERALS BY ELECTORS CAN ONLY REINFORCE THEIR GLOOM IN THE FACE OF THEIR PACT WITH THE GOVERNMENT AND THE PROSPECT OF A GENERAL ELECTION. TO DO ANYTHING TO PRECIPITATE AN ELECTION WOULD ONLY HASTEN THE DELUGE. A RECENT ANALYSIS OF LIBERAL VULNERABILITY, ASSUMING A UNIFORM NATION-WIDE LOSS OF TEN PERCENT OF THE TOTAL VOTE WITH OCTOBER 1974 AS THE BASE (I.E., THE LIBERAL SHARE OF THE TOTAL VOTE DECLINES FROM 18.8 TO 8.8 PERCENT) AND A UNIFORM 60/40 SPLIT OF THE VOTE BETWEEN THE TORIES AND LABOR, INDICATES THAT THEY MIGHT LOSE AS MANY AS 11 OF THEIR CURRENT 13 SEATS. (THE ASSUMPTIONS, OF COURSE, DO NOT TAKE ACCOUNT OF THE PARTICULARITIES OF INDIVIDUAL CONSTITUENCIES. LIBERALS WOULD BE UNLIKELY TO LOSE THAT MANY SEATS -- BUT THE ROUGH ANALYSIS DOES INDICATE THEIR PLIGHT.) SINCE DEFECTING LIBERAL VOTERS GENERALLY PREFER THE CONSERVATIVES, THIS SITUATION MUST ALSO CAUSE CALLAGHAN AND HIS LABOR COHORTS CONSIDERABLE DISTRESS.

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